With all due respect, I don't see why "teacher learning communities" and "formative assessment" is being presented as such a "brilliant new innovation". It all seems to me to be a common sense approach. As for the teacher learning communities...it is said "two heads are better then one." How much better are 8 to 10 heads? We have had some very good professional development presenters come to our school. The excitement lasts for about a month and then rapidly declines. The only way the information and excitement stays alive is for teachers to continue to talk about it with each other. This is where the learning communities come in. If the material is relevant and applicable, teacher learning communities can keep the fire going. All teachers will interpret and apply the information differently, thus giving the communities several different views to share as the community continues to develop over time. As for formative assessment...most subjects build upon themselves. Continual assessment as the course progresses helps students build a good solid foundation in the subject and it gives the teacher insight as to what students are falling behind. Sometimes we as teachers need to stop and put ourselves in the shoes of the student. How do we learn? What methods help us learn? If they work for us, it will work for the students in our class. I for one, learn better when I can discuss the subject with others and exchange ideas (learning communities), and I can stay on top of my learning when I am frequently using and testing what I have learned (formative assessment). If you don't use it, you lose it.  
One precaution to teacher learning communities: I believe it to be mandatory for all teachers to leave their tenure and pride at the door. For the learning communities to be productive all participants need to be heard and respected.

Jack, I agree with you about the tenure and pride at the door. Too many teachers try to use that as a road block and the learning communities are not effective because of those reasons. I do agree with you that several heads are better than one, especially if their are several different effective ideas that are being applied to produce successful results for students' performance.

Good common sense approach! It's a sure effective idea builder to notice how we learn, what interests us. Those very things likely relate to how others are affected. Good comment.

I agree with you Jack. The learning communities should also extend beyond the campus. We often have other teachers from different campuses around the district, state, and recently the UK, come and visit our school to learn and gleem new ideas for their local learning communities. Keeping our doors open not only to our fellow colleagues on our own campus but to any and all educators will help us to develop a global learning community. This is where technology will have such an important role. The wikis we created in the previous class have helped create our learning community and have been a tremendous help for me thus far.

I couldn't agree with you more, Jack! The cynic in me wants to reply that it's comparable to how we (rather, the district) pay a different consultant each year to train us in the latest methodology, but we just grumble and mutter under our breaths that we are in the wrong occupation since any of us can put words together and come up with a clever acronym for something that we already know and practice in the classroom and get paid in the thousands.

I also agree with your common sense approach. We also complain about it not being common in the world, and by deduction, this profession. Some people have a tendency to blow things out of proportion, lose their perspective, and/or forget about the ultimate goal.

Jack, I agree with the common sense of "learning communities", as well as the point you made about "use it or lose it'. I have always been a team player in life and advocate that in my professional career. However, these days its an, "I'm going to get mine, and who cares if you succeed" attitude in the work place and world. Sadly, these kinds of attitudes are keeping teams and learning communities from succeeding and I feel are the ones found in the schools that are at most risk. Just my opinion!

Jack, I agree with your comments - especially the part about leaving pride and tenure at the door. I love learning from new teachers; and having them at the table as equals gives them ownership in the process.

I was a little perplexed at the idea that "formative assessment" is something new. I couldn't imagine teaching all year, then expecting my students to pass the TAKS without using formative assessments along the way to guide me! I know my school administers a number of different assessments and benchmarks throughout the year; but if I am understanding the idea of formative assessment, perhaps teachers (and the district) should be breaking down assessments into much smaller chunks, assessing one objective at at time. "Assessment" does not have to equal "test."

Wiliam's model for effective TLC's was right on. Start with volunteers in similar teaching assignments; zero in on a small number of changes and strategies; meet regularly; follow a strict meeting format designed to keep the meeting on track.